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Document Title: Writing an Effective Introduction

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## Fall 2015 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and H

The Knight Award for Writing Exercises recognizes excellence in short exercises and/or handouts designed to improve student writing. Appropriate topics may be drawn from the whole range of writing issues, large scale to small scale, such as development of theses, use of secondary sources, organization of evidence, awareness of audience, attention to sentence patterns (e.g., passive/active voice; coordination/ subordination), attention to diction, uses of punctuation, attention to mechanics (e.g., manuscript formats, apostrophes). Exercises and handouts may be developed for use in or out of class.

Submissions should comprise three parts: (1) A copy of the handouts or instructions that go to students. (2) An explanation of the exercise/ handout and of the principles behind it, addressed to future instructors who may use the material. (3) If possible, an example of a student response.

Submissions may range in length from one to four or five pages.

Winning entries will be deposited in a web accessible archive and made available to other instructors under a creative commons attribution, non-commercial license. (See [creativecommons.org](http://creativecommons.org) for more information about cc licensing.)

To facilitate future searching of the Institute's archive, we ask that you provide a brief descriptive abstract (about 75 words) of your document, and a short list of appropriate keywords that might not appear in the text. Examples might include terms like "rhetorical situation," "style," "citation," etc. **Any borrowings such as quotations from course texts or handbooks must be cited properly in the document itself.**

The two winning entries will receive \$350; second place winners (if any) will receive \$125.

Submissions are due in 101 McGraw Hall by Thursday, December 17. No exceptions can be made.

## Fall 2015 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts

~Please Print Clearly. Do not staple. Use paper clips only~

Instructor's name Danielle Wu

Department MEDVL Course # and title MEDVL 1102.101 Fighting Words:

Anglo-Saxon  
Heroes and  
their Poetry  
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and/or national, about my winning the prize. I also grant the Knight Institute permission to deposit the writing exercises in a web accessible archive and make them available under a creative commons attribution, non-commercial license. I am prepared to send electronic versions of my text to Donna O'Hara ([dlo1@cornell.edu](mailto:dlo1@cornell.edu)) in the Knight Institute. I understand that I will receive the award for my prize-winning essay upon submission of the electronic text.

Writing An Effective Introduction  
Title of Writing Exercises

Instructor's signature

Danielle Wu

Date

12/14/15

## “Writing an Effective Introduction”

### **Handout Explanation**

This handout has two stages: a workshop version for class discussion and a polished version for reference. First, the students put into their own words the common opening gambit for academic writing. We then workshopped an introduction with me as the writer and the class as the tutor (an effective strategy for helping students recognize issues of coherence and cohesion). After prompting me with leading questions to clarify my argument, the class helped me revise each sentence by breaking the paragraph into the stages we had identified. I then gave the class a clean copy of our work as a writing reference that directly reflected their experience.

### **Keywords**

Introduction; Workshop; Revision; Tutoring; Organization; Clarity; Coherence; Cohesion.

## Workshop: Writing an Effective Introduction

### Background

This handout shares a common set of moves for the introduction in academic writing. This approach to the introduction originated from the Little Red Schoolhouse, the Writing Program of the University of Chicago. In our discussion, we will analyze rhetorical strategies by translating the terms into our own language. In the workshop, we will have the chance to discover these moves ourselves and practice the kind of thinking and flexibility needed for the revision process.

### The Structure of an Introduction

<b>The Little Red Schoolhouse<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Another Perspective</b>
<b>Stasis</b> An intellectually significant belief or theory that (if accepted by readers) would prevent them from accepting your thesis or its importance.	
<b>Concession</b> Some aspect of this stasis that may be right, helpful, productive, etc.	
<b>De-stabilizing Condition</b> Something that makes the stasis inaccurate, wrong, outdated, inappropriate, etc.	
<b>Consequences</b> Costs of leaving the problem unresolved, or benefits to resolving it	
<b>Solution</b> With these elements present in your introduction, your reader will be ready to perceive your Point or Thesis as a Solution (or promise of a solution)	

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<sup>1</sup> King-O'Brien, Kelly. "Cueing the Problem." Class handout for FWS Writing 1380: Introduction to Writing in the University. Cornell University. Ithaca, NY. October 7, 2014. Print.

## Sample Introduction

In his youth, Beowulf is an effective warrior who judges “both... words and deeds” as the watchman prescribes (ll. 287-89). Not only does Beowulf rebuff Unferth’s critique and defeat Grendel but he also counsels Hrothgar in the king’s grief and takes vengeance against Grendel’s mother. In these exploits, however, Beowulf relies upon his strength in order to fulfill his words. In his old age, Beowulf’s physical weakness makes it impossible for him to defeat the dragon. Yet in his speeches gearing up to the fight with the dragon, Beowulf fails to judge his own motivations for fighting the dragon alone. In his last speech, Beowulf’s focus on treasure as the means to his glory reveals an ultimately self-centered obsession that proves fatal both to himself and to his kingdom.

## In-Class Workshop

**Premise:** In his youth, Beowulf **APPEARS** to be an effective warrior who judges “both... words and deeds” as the watchman prescribes (ll. 287-89).

**Insight:** (Beowulf does manage to accomplish the following) “Not only does Beowulf rebuff Unferth’s critique and defeat Grendel but he also counsels Hrothgar in the king’s grief and takes vengeance against Grendel’s mother.”

**Limitation / Flaw in the Premise:** The problem is that Beowulf has personal ambitions apart from his service to his communities.

**Implications:** If you ignore that problem, you only see Beowulf’s distorted view of himself (e.g. awesome legacy = awesome warrior).

**Upgrade: SO,** it’s necessary to compare Beowulf’s boasts as a young warrior and as an old king. Such a comparison reveals a consistent flaw – Beowulf’s obsession for glory and treasure that is fatal both to himself and to his kingdom (see especially the useless treasure buried with Beowulf). **In other words,** heroic ambition, which is focused on the individual, leads to the destruction of the community.

## Reference: Writing an Effective Introduction

### Background

This handout reviews a common set of moves for the introduction in academic writing. This approach to the introduction originated from the Little Red Schoolhouse, the Writing Program of the University of Chicago.

### The Structure of an Introduction

<b>The Little Red Schoolhouse<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Another Perspective</b>
<b>Stasis</b> An intellectually significant belief or theory that (if accepted by readers) would prevent them from accepting your thesis or its importance.	<b>Opening Premise</b> A claim (often uncontroversial) that orients your reader to your topic, establishing common ground between you and your reader.
<b>Concession</b> Some aspect of this stasis that may be right, helpful, productive, etc.	<b>Insight</b> Why this claim is compelling or useful for interpreting the issue at hand.
<b>De-stabilizing Condition</b> Something that makes the stasis inaccurate, wrong, outdated, inappropriate, etc.	<b>Limitation</b> How this claim is misleading, e.g. too broad or limited in scope, in its use of terms, etc.
<b>Consequences</b> Costs of leaving the problem unresolved, or benefits to resolving it	<b>Implications</b> How this claim signals something we don't understand but should, opening a new line of investigation for your specific interest.
<b>Solution</b> With these elements present in your introduction, your reader will be ready to perceive your Point or Thesis as a Solution (or promise of a solution)	<b>Upgrade</b> Now that your reader has perceived the problem and is motivated to take your claims seriously, you can deploy your Argument as a Solution or at least as an Upgrade for this ongoing conversation.

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## Sample Introduction

In his youth, Beowulf is an effective warrior who judges “both... words and deeds” as the watchman prescribes (ll. 287-89). Not only does Beowulf rebuff Unferth’s critique and defeat Grendel but he also counsels Hrothgar in the king’s grief and takes vengeance against Grendel’s mother. In these exploits, however, Beowulf relies upon his strength in order to fulfill his words. In his old age, Beowulf’s physical weakness makes it impossible for him to defeat the dragon. Yet in his speeches gearing up to the fight with the dragon, Beowulf fails to judge his own motivations for fighting the dragon alone. In his last speech, Beowulf’s focus on treasure as the means to his glory reveals an ultimately self-centered obsession that proves fatal both to himself and to his kingdom.

## In-Class Workshop

<b>Opening Premise</b>	In his youth, Beowulf <i>appears</i> to be an effective warrior who judges “both... words and deeds” as the watchman prescribes (ll. 287-89).
<b>Insight</b>	Not only does Beowulf offer sound advice for Unferth’s jealousy and Hrothgar’s grief, but he also validates his counsel by defeating Grendel and his mother.
<b>Limitation</b>	<i>However</i> , Beowulf shows good judgment <i>only</i> when service to his community matches his personal desires for glory.
<b>Implications</b>	In his old age, Beowulf struggles to justify his decision to fight the dragon alone.
<b>Upgrade</b>	In his speeches before the battle and before his death, Beowulf reveals an obsession with the dragon’s treasure, which drives him to sacrifice the welfare of his kingdom for his own glory. The <i>Beowulf</i> -poet, in depicting the uselessness of the treasure as it lies buried with Beowulf, critiques heroic desire as self-destructive for both the hero and the community he is supposed to serve.